ARTSEMERSON ANNOUNCES A NEW ADDITION TO ITS 2021-2022 STAGE SEASON, AS THE ROLLING WORLD PREMIERE TOUR OF A BRAND NEW MUSICAL COMES TO BOSTON

DREAMING ZENZILE
FIVE PERFORMANCES ONLY
FEBRUARY 23 – 27, 2022
EMERSON PARAMOUNT CENTER | ROBERT J. ORCHARD STAGE

*****
BASED ON THE LIFE OF MIRIAM MAKEBA
WRITTEN & PERFORMED BY GRAMMY-NOMINATED SOMI
DIRECTED BY LILEANA BLAIN-CRUZ

*****

PLUS...

THE HOLIDAY SALE
ARTSEMERSON’S BIGGEST SALE EVENT OF THE YEAR WILL TAKE PLACE DECEMBER 01-03, 2021

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[Boston, MA – Tuesday, November 23, 2021] – ArtsEmerson, Boston’s leading presenter of contemporary world theater and film and the professional presenting and producing organization of Emerson College, is excited to announce a new addition to its 2021-2022 season, Dreaming Zenzile. Written and performed by Somi Kakoma, under the direction of Lileana Blain-Cruz, who directed the just-concluded … (Iphigenia) at ArtsEmerson, this brand new musical based on the extraordinary life of late South African singer and political activist Miriam Makeba will come to the Emerson Paramount Center’s Robert J. Orchard Stage from February 23 – 27, 2022. (Press opening is Thursday, February 24 at 7:30 PM.)

Dreaming Zenzile is a co-production with Octopus Theatricals, Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, Apollo Theater, McCarter Theatre Center, New York Theatre Workshop & National Black Theatre. The presentation at ArtsEmerson arrives at the heels of performances at the McCarter Theatre Center and will head to New York City in a co-production between New York Theatre Workshop and National Black Theatre.
ArtsEmerson is also pleased to announce its annual Holiday Sale will return this season, taking place December 01 – 03, 2021. Known as being ArtsEmerson’s biggest sale event of the year, the Holiday Sale will feature limited-time deep discounts on selected tickets to all remaining ArtsEmerson stage season events: White Rabbit Red Rabbit, Octavia E. Butler’s Parable of the Sower, Dreaming Zenzile, Everyday Life and Other Odds and Ends, Burgerz and Sea Sick.

The Holiday Sale takes place December 01 – 03, with discounted tickets available through all normal channels. Tickets may be purchased 24/7 at ArtsEmerson.org, by phone at 617-824-8400 (12:00PM ET - 6:00PM ET), or in person at the Paramount Center Box Office (open Noon - 6:00 PM ET at 559 Washington Street, Boston).

Dreaming Zenzile, which is based on the life of legendary singer Miriam Makeba, will include a live jazz band playing original music and reinterpretations of Makeba's remarkable catalog. The ancestors are calling - transporting her through the music and fractured memories of her past on a spiritual journey of reconciliation.

As both the musical’s writer and star, Somi Kakoma transports audiences to Makeba's final performance, where she raises the conscience and the consciousness of a people. Somi, whose jazz music and social consciousness has drawn comparison to Nina Simone, was nominated for a 2021 GRAMMY Award for Best Jazz Vocal Album and received an NAACP Image Award for her album, Holy Room: Live At Alte Oper. Her 2017 album, Petite Afrique, also won a 2018 NAACP Image Award for Outstanding Jazz Album.

Somi in the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis performance of Dreaming Zenzile
Photos by T Charles Erickson

A scene from the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis performance of Dreaming Zenzile


“What an honor it is for us to bring this incredible production to ArtsEmerson’s 2021-2022 season,” says David Howse, Executive Director at ArtsEmerson. “Somi’s musical depiction of Miriam Makeba is unforgettable, and we are thrilled to present Somi’s voice and vision on our stages here at ArtsEmerson.”
The production stars Somi as Miriam Makeba. It will be directed by Lileana Blain-Cruz, Hervé Samb will serve as musical director, with Marjani Forte-Saunders (choreography), Ricardo Hernandez (scene design), Mimi Plange (costume design), Yi Zhao (lighting design), and Justin Ellington (sound design). Special thanks to The Miriam Makeba Estate, The Mama Africa Cultural & Social Trust, and The Miriam Makeba Foundation for their support and permission to create this work.

For rehearsal stills and other media assets, click here.

LISTINGS INFORMATION FOR
THE ARTS EMERSON HOLIDAY SALE

ArtsEmerson's biggest sale event of the year, featuring deep, deep discounts on tickets to all these upcoming events:

**White Rabbit Red Rabbit** (December 07 - 12, 2021)
**Octavia E. Butler's Parable of the Sower** (February 17 - 20, 2022)
**Dreaming Zenzile** (February 23 - 27, 2022)
**Everyday Life and Other Odds and Ends** (March 12 - 27, 2022)
**Burgerz** (April 13 - 24, 2022)
**Sea Sick** (May 11 - 22, 2022)
**Sea Sick Livestream** (May 20, 2022)

**Dates:**
December 01 – 03, 2021
(Sale begins Wednesday 12/1 at 9:00 AM ET and ends Friday 12/3 at 11:59 PM ET.)

**Ticket Information:**
Tickets may be purchased 24/7 at ArtsEmerson.org. Phone orders and group sales are available by calling the ArtsEmerson Box Office at 617-824-8400 (open Tue-Sat from 12:00PM ET - 6:00PM ET). The Paramount Center Box Office (559 Washington Street, Boston) is open for walk-up service Thu-Sat from 12:00PM ET - 6:00 PM ET

LISTINGS INFORMATION FOR
DREAMING ZENZILE

**Dates:**
February 23 – 27, 2022

**Venue:**
Emerson Paramount Center | Robert J. Orchard Stage
559 Washington Street
Boston, MA 02111

**Performance Schedule:**
Wednesday, February 23, 2022  7:30pm
Thursday, February 24, 2022  7:30pm   Press Performance
Friday, February 25, 2022  8:00pm
Saturday, February 26, 2022  8:00pm
Sunday, February 27, 2022  2:00pm

**Ticket Information:**
Tickets for **Dreaming Zenzile** may be purchased 24/7 at ArtsEmerson.org. Phone orders and group sales are available by calling the ArtsEmerson Box Office at 617-824-8400 (open Tue-Sat from 12:00PM ET - 6:00PM ET). The Paramount Center Box Office (559 Washington Street, Boston) is open for walk-up service Thu-Sat from 12:00PM ET - 6:00 PM ET. Tickets range $25-$95

**Content Advisory:**
ArtsEmerson understands that certain types of content could trigger past traumatic experiences for some viewers. Please be aware that this production contains scenes of violence against women. For further detail, please visit ArtsEmerson.org.

**More Information:**
All guests at the theatre are required to agree to abide by ArtsEmerson’s **Shared Code of Conduct**, which includes attesting to being fully vaccinated or receiving a qualifying negative test for COVID-19 and indoor mask wearing, among other public health best practices. Please visit this Public Health Info page on the ArtsEmerson website for complete information.

**CREDITS**

WRITER AND LEAD PERFORMER
Somi Kakoma

DIRECTOR
Lileana Blain-Cruz

CHOREOGRAPHER
Marjani Forté-Saunders

MUSICAL DIRECTOR
Herve Samb

**PERFORMER BIOGRAPHIES**

**Somi Kakoma (Miriam Makeba)**
Vocalist, composer, actor and playwright Somi Kakoma was born in Illinois to immigrants from Uganda and Rwanda. Known simply as "Somi" in the music world, she often combines her artistry and her activism. Subsequently, she has been widely honored as a Soros Equality Fellow, a TED Senior Fellow, a USA Doris Duke Fellow, a Sundance Theatre Fellow, a 2021 GRAMMY nominee, and a recipient of two NAACP Image Awards. Mentored by legendary South African trumpeter Hugh Masekela, The New York Times hailed Somi for her “supple jazz singing and compassionate social consciousness.” Her fifth studio, which also honors Miriam Makeba, will be released in March 2022 just before Somi's Off-Broadway debut. *Dreaming Zenzile* is her first play. Somi is the founder of Salon Africana, a boutique record label and cultural agency for contemporary African musicians and writers. She holds undergraduate degrees in Anthropology and African studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, and a Master’s Degree in Performance Studies from New York University’s Tisch School of the Arts. She is presently pursuing a PhD in Creative Practice and Critical Inquiry at Harvard University’s Department of Music. In her heart of hearts, she is an East African Midwestern girl who loves family, poetry, and freedom.
Aaron Marcellus (Sangoma Chorus)
a singer, vocal coach, writer, musician, dancer and actor from Atlanta, got his start in gospel
music and has performed around the world. He has recorded albums and was voted to the top
24 on American Idol in 2011. After a world tour, Marcellus was featured in a ChapStick
commercial, NBC’s Next Caller and STOMP. Marcellus also hosts a burlesque show at Duane
Park. He founded Surrender to Love, LLC, a foundation that supports arts programs and seeks
to feed the hungry, and Adventure Voice, a training program offering vocal classes for groups
and individuals.

Naledi Masilo (Sangoma Chorus)
is a zesty vocalist, composer and arts practitioner from Johannesburg, South Africa. She
cultivated her love for music through backyard jam sessions and endless artistic curiosity.
Deeply passionate about music and women, Masilo graduated with a Bachelor of Social
Sciences from the University of Cape Town and a Jazz Performance degree from The New
England Conservatory in Boston. Masilo has been a resident at the Kennedy Center (DC)
through Betty Carter’s Jazz Ahead Program, where she was mentored by the likes of Dee Dee
Bridgewater and Jason Moran. She has also been selected as part of the prestigious South
African Standard Bank National Youth Jazz Band and has been invited to participate in the
Banff International Jazz and Creative Music workshop in Calgary, Canada. Masilo is due to
make prolific strides in the arts industry—a young artist with a voice and story to remember!

Phumzile Sojola (Sangoma Chorus)
is from Gqeberha, South Africa. He originated the role of Lord Pinkleton in the Broadway
production of Cinderella and made his Broadway debut in Porgy and Bess (Peter). Off-
Broadway, he has appeared in Three Mo’ Tenors and The Phantom of the Opera (Ubaldo
Piangi). Opera credits include L’etoile (Herrisson) and Troubled Island (Popo), New York City
Opera; La Boheme (Rodolfo), Missouri Symphony Orchestra; Lost in the Stars (Leader), Skylark
Opera; The Magic Flute (Monostatos) and Carmen (Remendado), Dayton Opera; Porgy and
Bess (Robbins/Crabman), Opera National de Lyon and The Edinburgh International Festival.
Orchestral concerts include Jacksonville Symphony and Knoxville Symphony, Philadelphia
Orchestra, Dayton Philharmonic Orchestra, Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and Krasnoyarsk
Ballet Orchestra. He has also performed at the famed art festival La Biennale di Venezia with
pianist Jason Moran. He can be heard on the Broadway cast recordings of Cinderella as well as
The Gershwin’s Porgy and Bess. Other recordings include Treemonisha (Cephus) with the

Phindi Wilson (Sangoma Chorus)
a native of South Africa, is an amazing song writer/music producer who began her career early
on in SA performing in theatrical productions all around the world. She performed with Michael
Jackson at Nelson Mandela’s 80th birthday, performed In Mbongeni Ngema’s productions
Mama (as a main character) and Sarafina 2 in Europe and Australia. She was in a movie
soundtrack of The Lion King in 1994 at Sun City, SA. Most notable credits include the role of
Rafiki in the US tour, Las Vegas, Madrid and Brazil productions of Disney’s The Lion King to The
Festival of The Lion King in Hong Kong. Most recently, Mrs. Wilson worked on the
developmental lab of Mandela, The Wildflower and Dreaming Zenzile. Television credits include
We Are New York short film, Orange Is the New Black, Law & Order and Flatbush. Phindi is was
nominated as an outstanding best actor at The Helen Hayes Awards in Washington DC. She is
honored to be part of Dreaming Zenzile.
BAND:

**Hervé Samb (Guitar / Musical Director)**
is a virtuoso guitarist, original composer, arranger and respected producer. He has established himself as an outstanding musician worldwide, with many famous artists such as Marcus Miller, Oumou Sangaré, Salif Keïta and so many others. He is occasionally an artistic director for renowned artists such as Kellylee Evans, Somi and Lisa Simone, to name a few. His four previous albums as a leader have all been acclaimed by the public and international critics, through which he confirms a unique style, the “Jazz Sabar,” born from the rhythms of the sabar—traditional Senegalese percussion, crossing original melodies inspired by both traditional Senegalese tunes and contemporary jazz. In 2020, he recorded two new albums: Benn, a much-awaited first solo opus, and Jolof, in which he finds the “Teranga Band” to take the “Jazz Sabar” of which he is both the pioneer and ambassador, even further.

**Toru Dodo (Piano)**
was born in Tokyo and is an alumnus of Berklee College of Music currently living in New York. A pianist, composer, arranger, producer, author and Grammy nominee, he has released five solo albums. Also one of New York’s most in-demand sidemen, Dodo has worked with jazz luminaries including Kenny Garrett, Benny Golson and Curtis Fuller. Most recently, he has been frequently performing and traveling worldwide with notable singers such as Somi, Nicole Henry, Alicia Olatuja and Laurin Talese. He also has been one of the regular pianists for the Off-Broadway hit show Sleep No More since 2011. His book Excellent Jazz Piano, which features his solo piano arrangements, was published by Rittor Music in Japan in 2008. He performed on Somi’s Holy Room: Live at Alte Oper with Frankfurt Radio Big Band that was nominated for a 2021 Grammy Award for Best Jazz Vocal Album. He has been involved in the creation of Dreaming Zenzile from the beginning and is excited about the world premiere at The Rep.

**Sheldon Thwaites (Percussion)**
is an award-winning International Caribbean-American percussionist, specializing in drum set and steel pan. Drums were his first love, but after pursuing music at the high school level, he transitioned into composition, arranging and production. He has worked with such artists as Chris Daughtry, Lauryn Hill, Amel Larrieux, Cobi and Marina Satti. Sheldon has played drums internationally for world-renowned steel bands Wilco Desperados, Phase II Pan Groove and Skiffle Bunch. He has studied drum set with Terri Lynn Carrington, John Blackwell and Dave Dicenso. Sheldon is a graduate of Boston Arts Academy and Berklee College of Music. He currently resides in Washington, DC.

**Pathé Jassi (Bass)**
has collaborated with a diverse group of accomplished musicians in a career that has spanned over three decades. Originally from Dakar, Senegal, Jassi has traveled the globe performing and recording alongside legendary West African vocalists Youssou N’Dour, Cheikh Lo, Monsour Seck, Baba Maal and guitarist Hervé Samb. In addition, he has lent his artistry to Detroit artists such as Luis Resto, Marcus Belgrave, Wendell Harrison, John Arnold and Mike E. He also worked closely with Sam Sanders, one of Detroit’s jazz legends. Pathe’s rare ability to combine bebop with a polyrhythmic African sound has made him one of Detroit’s most revered jazz musicians.

**PARTNER BIOGRAPHIES**
ArtsEmerson
ArtsEmerson is the professional presenting and producing organization at Emerson College, and its mission is to bring people together to experience powerful performances that delight, provoke, and inspire, celebrating both our differences and common humanity. Founded in 2010 by Robert J. Orchard — the year the U.S. Census confirmed there was no single cultural majority in Boston — ArtsEmerson is committed to building a cultural institution that reflects the diversity of our city. Our imaginative and globe-spanning live and virtual performances, films, and conversations invites each of us to be part of a Boston that is more creative, equitable, and connected. ArtsEmerson is led by Executive Director, David Howse. For more information visit ArtsEmerson.org.

Emerson College
ArtsEmerson and HowlRound Theatre Commons both operate from within the Emerson College Office of the Arts. Based in Boston, Massachusetts, opposite the historic Boston Common and in the heart of the city’s Theatre District, Emerson College educates individuals who will solve problems and change the world through engaged leadership in communication and the arts, a mission informed by liberal learning. The College has 3,700 undergraduates and 1,400 graduate students from across the United States and 50 countries. Supported by state-of-the-art facilities and a renowned faculty, students participate in more than 90 student organizations and performance groups. Emerson is known for its experiential learning programs in Los Angeles, Washington, DC, the Netherlands, London, China, and the Czech Republic as well as its new Global Portals. The College has an active network of 51,000 alumni who hold leadership positions in communication and the arts. For more information, visit Emerson.edu. For media inquiries specific to Emerson College, please contact Michelle Gaseau (E: Michelle_Gaseau@emerson.edu, O: 617-824-3547, C: 617-429-2624).

Octopus Theatricals
Founded by Tony and Grammy-winning producer Mara Isaacs, Octopus Theatricals collaborates with artists and organizations to foster an expansive range of compelling theatrical works for local and global audiences. We eschew boundaries—aesthetic, geopolitical, institutional—and thrive on a nimble and rigorous practice. Current projects include Hadestown by Anaïs Mitchell (Broadway, 8 Tony Awards including Best Musical; Grammy Award, Best Musical Theater Album); …(Iphigenia) a new opera by Wayne Shorter and esperanza spalding; SOCIAL! Dance Club created by Steven Hoggett, Christine Jones and David Byrne; An Iliad by Lisa Peterson and Denis O’Hare (Obie Award); Dianne McIntyre’s Speaking In The Same Tongue; And So We Walked by DeLanna Studi; Bill Irwin’s On Beckett; and Theatre for One and many more. In 2020, Octopus launched the Producer Hub, an online resource supporting independent producers in the experimental and performing arts sectors. www.octopustheatricals.com

National Black Theatre
National Black Theatre (NBT), the nation’s first revenue-generating Black arts complex, was founded in 1968 by the late visionary artist Dr. Barbara Ann Teer. NBT is the longest-running Black theatre in New York City, one of the oldest theaters founded and consistently operated by a woman of color. NBT uses a multidisciplinary theatrical approach as a means to center, humanize and heal Black communities through the power of unapologetic Black storytelling. NBT’s unique approach to Black liberation, Art, and Placemaking act as a change agent to combat systemic oppression, which creates the space for human transformation. www.nationalblacktheatre.org

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